Understanding Naga Lullabies: Translation, Documentation, and Feature Analysis

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Article Info	Abstract
  	Lullabies are a genre of music predominantly used for lulling children and infants to sleep. Traditionally classified under 'Folklore' studies, lullabies are part of folksongs and are closely associated with the transmission of cultural knowledge and traditions. The Nagas, a tribal community, transmit their culture and literature orally, as they did not have a written script before British colonialism and the advent of Christian missionaries. Consequently, most of their lullabies are scarcely documented. This paper documents selected Naga tribal lullabies and presents them with English translations, highlighting the rich linguistic diversity and cultural significance embedded in these songs. The study primarily focuses on three aspects of its survey of lullabies: *(i) Documenting Naga lullabies from selected tribes.* *(ii) Translating the lullabies into English, ensuring the preservation of their original meaning and cultural context.* *(iii) Studying the features of Naga lullabies, focusing on the linguistic elements.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A lullaby is a soothing and gentle song sung for children to quiet them or to lull them to sleep. Cradle song, lulling song and soothing song are some synonyms of lullabies. Lullabies are a universal phenomenon and have existed since ancient times. Perry (2013), One of the earliest documented lullabies is found inscribed on a Babylonian clay tablet believed to be about 4000 years old. Interestingly, the features of lullabies are consistent across diverse cultures – they possess a peaceful hypnotic quality and are characterised by simple tones with short and long pauses between sections.

Cultures around the world use songs to coax their babies to sleep. The themes of lullabies are also similar across cultures, where the lyrics of lullabies are expressions of fear, hopes and dreams for the future. It also includes themes that narrate about cultures and traditions. The element of soothing is one common feature observed in all lullabies across cultures. Although lullabies sound soothing and reassuring, their lyrics, however, can be dark and far from comforting. This feature of lullabies' dark lyrics is also a commonality found in many different cultures. Orkrent (2023) compiled some creepy lullabies. the popular English Lullaby "Rock-a-Bye, Baby" is a fearful song, where the cradle falls from a tree top. Similarly, the Icelandic lullaby "Bíum, Bíum, Bambaló" is a haunted song, and the Russian "Bayu Bayushki Bayu" is a song with warning and grave consequences. Japanese lullabies, also known as "Lullabies of Itsuki," are songs misfortune and

anguish of young girls who were sent to work for rich people. The lyrics of these collections of lullabies are heart-wrenching *"Nobody will shed tears when I die. Only cicadas on the persimmon tree will cry"* are lyrics from a well-known Itsuki lullaby. Lullabies are not just about coaxing the baby to sleep with a soothing hum, but lullabies can have multiple purposes. Lullabies are songs that put children to sleep, but in addition to that, it is a creative expression where stories are told, culture and traditions are transmitted, fear and anguish of mothers are expressed, love and caress, fear and intimidation are expressed.

1. Brief background of the study

Nagaland is home to numerous diverse tribal communities, each with unique languages and cultures. Lullabies are an integral part of all Naga tribes, yet there has been a significant lack of documentation and systematic study of these traditional songs. This research aims to fill that gap by documenting and examining the characteristics of Naga lullabies, with a particular emphasis on identifying their common linguistic features across different tribes.

2. Statement of the problem

The documentation and study of Naga lullabies are limited, with only a few recorded songs and writings available in newsletters and mass media platforms. There is a noticeable decline in the use of indigenous lullabies, particularly among those living in urban areas, where children are more likely to learn English lullabies than their native ones. Given these circumstances, the systematic documentation and study of Naga lullabies is crucial.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical works and the study of Naga lullabies are limited; therefore, research papers, articles and dissertations are consulted that are relevant to the paper. Zhimo and Gupta (2022), this paper analysed the contextual elements of Sumi Naga lullabies and presented how Sumi women living within a repressive patriarchal set-up use lullabies to vent their angst, desires and longings for their family and village. The paper also brings in the patriarchal society aspect where women are repressed from expressing their views and turn to lullabies as a source to let out their frustration and emotions.

Rajkhowa (2022), presents Assamese lullabies by taking a multi-analysis approach and categorising them into five types: Nature, Society, Humour, Imaginative and Tragic Compassionate lullabies. Hemati and Nazari (2014) analyse the relationship between lullabies and culture by presenting cultural elements found in Kalhor lullaby songs. The cultural role of the mother and the relationship between the mother and child can be perceived through the lullabies of the Kalhor. The themes of Kalhor's lullabies revolve around the mother's desire for her baby, emphasising the role of the mother to take care of the children and also extend to the importance of women having children. Kalhor's lullabies intend to transmit cultural values and expectations from their women.

Evered's (2020), thesis is an exploration of lullabies from different countries, exemplifying the range of music in the selected lullabies and presenting the contextual varieties of these songs. The study also concludes by presenting the therapeutic benefits of lullabies in children.

Pester (2016) explores lullabies through conversation and improvised song. Pester puts forward the pertinent question: "What narratives are sung in a lullaby?" Pester suggests that lullaby narratives are not necessarily for the baby to understand, but rather it's the singer's (cultural) compulsion to voice their anxieties, frustrations, fears and dreams. The relevant part of this paper for the present study is answering the question: What narratives are sung in a lullaby? Lullabies' narratives range from baby-stealing fairies, cursed soldiers, murder ballads, angered house demons, father-killing hyenas, and sunken ships.

Hasanuddin (2020) studies the lullaby text and oral tradition of the coastal regions of the Minangkabau. The study shows that the Minangkabau collective lullaby songs have a pragmatic aesthetic function of language in speech and also possess other broader social functions. The study concludes by presenting the significance of lullabies as cultural heritage and lullabies with their social functions: (i) an expressive function, conveying feelings, thoughts, and attitudes to life, (ii) a directive function, teaching the cultural values and (iii)

aesthetic function, presenting the beauty of language and lulling them to sleep.

Ameen et.al (2021) The study presented a stylistic Analysis of the Poem "Lullaby for a Palestinian Child" by ¨ Faiz Ahmad and found that the author, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, has employed several stylistic devices in his poems, such as alliteration, consonance, repetition, assonance, rhyme and cacophony. The literary devices employed by the poet add to the musicality of the poem and make the poem more appealing. In addition to the diverse stylistic devices used in the poem, the poet used various sources of foregrounding, such as parallelism and deviation. these stylistic devices and sources of foregrounding, the author has brought to the fore the key themes he wants to convey to the general reader.

Research Objectives

The study focuses on three main objectives
a. To document Naga lullabies from selected tribes.
b. To translate the lullabies into English, ensuring the preservation of their original meaning and cultural context.
c. To study the features of Naga lullabies, focusing on the linguistic elements.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This descriptive research employed elicitation techniques through interviews. Knowledgeable elders from each selected tribal community were identified and interviewed to document their lullabies. The lullabies were recorded as they were sung, using a recording device. For translation, the study adopted a semantic translation method to translate the lullabies into English.

Presentation of the Naga Lullabies

Table 1: Yimkhuing Tribe

d. Yimkhuing[1] Naga Lullaby	
Title: The Sad Lullaby of our Forefathers	"Pijilu Mülong Lüli lüfah Khün"
Non-lexical vocable[2]	Oh holo … holo oh hoi … heya a
Non-lexical vocable	Oh holoyi … holo oh hoi … heya a
That flower blooms	Sangpün pong jü, Sangpün pong jü
Non-lexical vocable	Heya a
That hoolock making sound is a ruler	Huli khong jü kithsulem nou heya
Wild lily is the ruler	Lüra longpühn kithsulem nou
Non-lexical vocable	Heya..a
Alas! It will not come again	Hai! Mü lülüng reh heya a
Nonsense syllables which may or may not be mixed with meaningful text used in a variety of music.	

There are two types of lullabies in the Yimkhuing Chirr dialect. The lullaby to put the baby to sleep is called 'Lüya', which is sung by picking random words without a story behind it. The other lullaby called 'Lüfah' is a sad lullaby that originated from ancestors' stories.

The story behind the lullaby:

There was once a man named Longse, who was the headman of a village. He loved a lady deeply; however, before he could make her his beloved,

she passed away. This mournful lullaby is sung by the headman, reminiscing about his lost love.

Line 1- The first line signifies the vibrancy of youth and is compared to 'Blooming flowers.'

Line 2- The second line speaks of the animal, the gibbon, which makes a sound at sunrise, indicating it is morning. Similarly, the headman of the village announced their daily activities in the morning. So, when the headman passes away, hearing the gibbon sound, the

villagers remember and are saddened when they hear 'Huli' making sound.

Line 3- The third lines talk about a particular flower which blooms white and is planted to create boundaries. When a dispute occurs, the ruler/headman makes peace and the boundary flowers are planted. So, when the headman dies, seeing the wild white lily, the village people remember their headman.

Table 2: Khiamnuingan Tribe

e. Khiamniungan Naga (Pathso dialect) Lullabies	
Lullaby 1	
Grandpa, make me a basket	Oh pao tsumthsou ouu-kiu
What to pluck and put?	Atei pathiu ah?
To pluck and put gooseberries	Che-iu pathiu ah
To feed what?	Atei hao wao ah?
To feed our guest	Tsi-sha hao wao ah
Where is our guest?	Tsi sha aleu?
Under our granary	Tsi beinyiu khem ko
Where is our granary?	Tsi bei aleu?
Landslide slide it away	Sedai dailo-ai
Where is landslide?	Sedai aleu?
Hoe ploughed it away	Changwam wamlo ai
Where is the hoe?	Changwam aleu?
Burnt it in the fire	Eaie lew dyowai
Where is fire?	Eain aleu?
The rain put it out	Oh-ou ounyeaie ai
Where is the rain?	Oh-oun aleu?
Quill (small bird) sucked it up	Melai thseb heaie-ai
Where is the quill?	Melei aleu?
Went to its grandfather's house barking	Apa pao nok-lae ong-ong tü thsa-thsa ko yo-ai Yo-ai

Table 3: Khiamnuingan Tribe

Lullaby 2	
Oh, insect baby (larva)	Oh hyam tsik-tsik[3] thsou
Do not make a sound near my house	Ja-phong ka nyasui
My grandfather kept a place for you to make sound	Japao oh kou lasui ta vai-ewnyae
My grandmother kept a place for you to make sound there	Ja-ji oh kou lasui ta vai-ewnyae
My grandfather's grounded sesame is completely oily	Ja-pao nyamtao-khiu tong-ta iu
My grandmother's grounded sesame is completely oily	Ja-ji nyamtao-khiu tongta-iu
Non-lexical vocable	Tong tong khalo tong

Non-lexical vocable	Khalo yochiu pho
Non-lexical vocable	Yochiu hwa ta liu
Non-lexical vocable	Hwa hwa kachong kachong
Jumped into my uncle Pachio's house	Ja-kaew Pachio jam-lae kwabkü shongnap
Turn a shiny polished dao so that it Flashes	Hanong shalap .
A green insect found during summer, which makes the sound tsik-tsik.	

In Lullaby 1 and 2, the focus is not on the meaning of the lullabies but rather on the melody of the song. In both lullabies, the choice of words is also cautiously simplified for easy comprehension, allowing children to learn the song and retain the melody. Children (as listeners) are not expected to understand a story; more emphasis is on the melody to lull them to sleep.

Table 4: Angami Tribe

f. Angami Naga Lullabies

Lullaby[4] 1 (Khonoma dialect)

Non-lexical vocable	Oh iyo oh ho
Non-lexical vocable	Oh iyo we oh
Oh baby girl, don't cry	Oh nganuo krahie
You are the only girl child	Thenu nie rübei
Oh in the family	Oh u kinu ba
The most favoured/loved child	U pha nuo chü
Oh, within a short time	Oh telhe modi
You will live in another village (meaning she will be married off)	Sievo mia ra lhou
Oh one side my child	Oh lutsa u nuo chü
One side my husband	Latsa a noupfü chü
Don't rebuke the child, (for they will go soon)	U nuo ruo hieluo
Non-lexical vocable	Oh iyo iyo we ho
Non-lexical vocable	Oh iyo iyo we ho

Lullaby 2

Non-lexical vocable	Oh iyo waho (oh waho)
Non-lexical vocable	Oh wa-ü waho (oh waho)
Sleep without crying	Kra modi zelie
If you don't sleep	Zelie kemo sa
At the place of the burial side	Sakikha tsakha
A spirit is there	Temi puo noma
Coming to catch you	Khorü ntelie tuo shie
Non-lexical vocable	Oh iyo waho
Take your child and go outside	Nbu nnuo piepra
At the side of Secümia	Secümia kikha
To look at it	Meho shü nu shie

Lullaby 1 is an outpouring of the love of a mother to her daughter, and the lyrics attest to the closeness of mother and daughter. Lullaby 2 is a gentle warning to the child by the singer that a spirit lurks in the burial grounds that will come and take the child if it doesn't fall asleep. In both lullabies, the elements of a poem in the form of rhythm are observed along with a unique feature of fixed syllables. Angamis have nine fixed syllables in each line for all their folksongs, whereas the lullabies consist of five fixed syllables. This number of syllables creates a rhythm that can accommodate the storytelling as well as cause a lulling effect.

Table 5: Pochury Tribe

g. Pochury Naga Lullaby	
Alas! Tears fall	Ahya! Rüthrü shie
Dead ones must not worry	Aküsü -wa noh luoveh münatümü
Even the ocean will rise	Ajuh kajiwa nga ji-nanü
Oh mother, oh father	Oh ezah-o oh epa-o
This is the life of an orphan	Mürari kürho hanü
An orphan has none to call 'Mother'	Mürari nü azah nyo-mte rarü
An orphan has none to call 'Father'	Mürari nü apa nyo-mte rarü
Don't cry, cry, cry	Mükrietümü ti krie krie ti
Oh! Evi-o (name of the little sister) go to sleep	Oh! Evi-o zetewa luo nü
Oh! Evi-o	
Oh! Evi-o	
Oh! Evi-o sleep	Oh! Evi-o zetewaluo

This is a Pochury (Meluri dialect) lullaby. The song originated from the life of a young girl who lost both her parents at a very young age and was left to care for her baby sister. Repetition of certain words and lines is reminiscent of a refrain in a song that drives home the message of the lullaby.

Table 6: Sangtam Tribe

h. Sangtam Naga Lullaby	
Oh, my little child	Oh ihrü achangrü
My Sweet, pampered child	Mütsumrü
Sleep happily, my baby	Amüila künyangseh yap oh …
Don't be afraid and dream well	Mütrabü melang atsa
And sleep well	Melang yap oh …
God will protect you while you are sleeping	Tsingrangbana nü tsongdi
Oh …	Oh …
Oh, my little child	Oh ihrü achangrü
Tsahtsapongla (girl's name) sleep	Tsahtsapongla yüpseh
Sleeping away	Tside … E …
Why are you crying?	Sünü lahcho traro … (2x)
Father will go to uncle's field	Awanü akarü lulang nushah
And will bring cucumber for you	Hilong jünung
So don't cry	Düdra na …
Non-lexical vocable	Ho … e … ho … a
Non-lexical vocable	Ihulo … e … ho … a
You are my sweet baby	Mütsümrü-e ko
So, I will pamper you	Mütsüm nungnung aye
Non-lexical vocable	Ho … e … ho …
Non-lexical vocable	Ho … e … oh … a

In this Sangtam lullaby, the caregiver of the young child endearingly coaxes her to go to sleep. Aside from the content of the lullaby, again, there is the presence of non-lexical vocables used with a slow rhythmic melody that is aimed at creating a lulling effect.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Features of Naga Lullabies:

A. Poetic Elements: The lullabies exhibit typical poetic elements such as rhyme, rhythm, and meter. External rhyme and identical rhyme are evident in Khiamniungan Naga, Pochury Naga, and Angami Naga lullabies.

Example of External Rhyme:

Khiamniungan Naga (Pathso dialect) Lullabies

Oh pao tsumthsou ouu-kiu

Atei pathiu ah?

Che-iu pathiu ah
Atei hao wao ah?

Tsi-sha hao wao ah

Tsi sha aleu?

Example: Identical Rhyme

Angami Naga Lullabies

Oh iyo iyo we ho
Oh iyo iyo we

Non-lexical vocables are occasionally used in specific intervals to continue with the rhythm of the lullabies (examples as seen in Angami, Yimkhuing lullabies).

Example of non-lexical vocable in Sangtam Naga Lullaby

Non-lexical vocable
Ho … e … ho …
Non-lexical vocable
Ho … e … oh … a

The meter in Angami lullabies has fixed syllables of 5 in each line, with an interval between stressed and unstressed syllables.

Example in Angami Naga Lullaby

Non-lexical vocable   Oh i yo oh ho

	1	2	3	4	5
(5 syllables)					
Non-lexical vocable		Oh	iyo	we	oh
Oh baby girl, don't cry	Oh	nga	nuo	kra	hie
	1	2	3	4	5

(5 syllables)

One unique feature of Angami Naga Poetry (not modern) and indigenous songs is that they are all fixed with 9 syllables in each line. This pattern of a fixed syllable system is also identified in Angami lullabies, where each line of the lullaby contains a fixed five syllables in each line.

B. The selected lullabies also incorporate cultural elements, narrating stories of ancestors, traditional lifestyles, and cultural beliefs, reflecting the rich heritage of the Naga people.

C. Naga lullabies share universal features like simplicity in tone, repetition, and a soothing, soft melody. Repetitive melodic patterns and flexible rhyme or rhythm enhance their hypnotic quality. Musically, they favour harmonious, pleasing intervals (consonance) over tense, unstable ones (dissonance). The singing is gentle and soft, often with a humming quality, creating a calm, soothing atmosphere.

D. The themes in the selected Naga lullabies include fear, hope, love, and dreams for the future, reflecting the emotional and aspirational aspects of Naga's life.

E. A notable feature found in many cultures, including Naga lullabies, is the presence of dark or ominous lyrics. For example, in Angami Lullaby 2, the lyrics describe a dark spirit lurking nearby, ready to catch those who refuse to sleep. This element adds a unique, haunting dimension to the lullabies.

V. CONCLUSION

There are no documented records on the origins of Naga indigenous lullabies, but it can be cautiously assumed that they have been passed down orally through generations. Naga lullabies share universal features typical of lullabies worldwide, such as soothing melodies, repetitive structures, and gentle rhythms. However, they also have unique characteristics, notably the use of non-lexical vocables—syllables or sounds that don't form actual words but enhance the musical

and rhythmic quality of the lullabies, adding a distinct melodic texture.

Nagaland, a state in northeastern India, is home to several tribes, of which the State Government officially recognises 18. This study focuses on lullabies from six of these tribes. Each tribe has its own cultural heritage, language, customs, and musical traditions, and this diversity is reflected in their lullabies. While they share common lullaby traits, each tribe's lullabies exhibit distinct cultural elements.

There is an urgent need for systematic documentation and critical study of Nagaland's lullabies. Their oral transmission makes them vulnerable to being forgotten or altered as cultural practices evolve. Preserving these lullabies through documentation will safeguard them for future generations and allow for academic study of their role in socialisation, cultural identity, and emotional development. Such analysis can also provide insight into the broader significance of music in human societies and the universal yet diverse nature of lullabies across cultures.

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